

The Wayward Child: an ideological analysis of sports contract holdout coverage

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ABSTRACT *Journalists write and talk frequently about the escalating salaries earned by professional athletes. Special scorn is reserved for those athletes who hold out—for more money, or to renegotiate their contracts. In this ideological analysis, I explore the ideology that emerges from beat coverage by Seattle sportswriters of the 1999 holdout by Joey Galloway, a star receiver for the Seattle Seahawks. From July to November 1999, Galloway and the Seahawks were embroiled in a very public dispute over a contract extension sought by Galloway. My analysis is built on the idea that certain ideologies become dominant, to the exclusion of ideologies that present alternative perspectives. These perspectives are marginalized or suppressed. Thus, one way of “seeing the world” holds sway—it achieves hegemony. For sports fans in Seattle, it becomes the preferred reading of Galloway’s conduct. Articles for the analysis were taken from Seattle’s two daily newspapers and cover the entire holdout. The ideology that emerges from these articles revolves around several key ideas: the team is sacred—it is bigger, and has more value, than any of its individual members; the coach is the ultimate authority figure, one whose judgment should never be questioned; a holdout by its very nature threatens the team; and players who do hold out are seen as greedy, selfish, and disloyal, or at the very least, driven solely by pragmatism. It was a news frame created and advanced by team officials. Seattle beat writers painted a picture of Galloway as a spoiled, petulant child who had to be stripped of his individuality and spend some time alone before coming back to the team. Findings from the analysis can be used to help reporters improve their coverage of contract negotiations.*

KEY WORDS: *Journalism, Sports Journalism, Ideology, Ideological Analysis, Textual Analysis*

Introduction

Sports fans have a love–hate relationship with professional athletes. We love them when they play well, and hate them when they move to another team or ask for more money—or don’t earn that money in our estimation. Fans lash out at those athletes who they think are being too greedy, or unappreciative—both in person at games and via the media, by clogging the phone lines to sports talk radio stations, or chatting with likeminded individuals over the Internet.

Such criticism is not limited to fans. Journalists, too, have arduous relationships with the athletes they cover. Journalists depend on athletes for information around which they build their stories, even though these stories—and quotes from athletes—are often criticized for sounding remarkably similar. Like so many other public figures, athletes are coached by media trainers in how to speak effectively to

reporters. This makes life easier for the athlete and for the reporter; although journalists lament that the practice only increases the number of “canned” quotes. Some athletes, like retired National Basketball Association (NBA) star Karl Malone, have responded to what they feel is unfair treatment by journalists by refusing to speak with them, often in celebrated fashion. The most recent incarnation of this refusal are player websites (e.g., AthletesDirect.com), where an athlete can dispense quotes and a variety of other subjects, away from the locker-room crush with reporters.

At the same time, journalists are criticized for sometimes getting too close to the athletes—for acting like “groupies” who want game tickets more than a good story. This level of intimacy makes it impossible for journalists to write objectively. This is not a new development. Before television so radically changed the sports landscape, journalists worked as extensions of

the public relations departments for professional teams (Telander, 1984). More teams, more games, and more coverage caused journalists to change how they covered sports. Journalists were called on to give an "insider's" take on the athletes. News about the movement of players between teams via trades and free-agent signings now dominates sports journalism, especially when a professional league nears its trading deadline (for Major League Baseball, July 31). The private lives of athletes are laid bare and dissected. Team and league officials, it seems, have quietly embraced the "insider's" perspective and have used it to successfully market their teams. Journalists write and talk frequently about escalating salaries and about the athletes who have and have not performed well enough to earn them. But Lowes argues that the sportswriter's role has not changed that much after all. Sportswriters supply the information, positive or negative, "that generates massive public interest in, and attachment to, big-time sports" (2000, p. 11).

Yet, when a professional athlete transgresses, journalists typically come down hard. Arrests and criminal charges make for scintillating stories. Team owners are criticized when they offer second, and sometimes third and fourth chances, to these fallen heroes. But the only thing worse, it seems, in the minds of journalists than committing a crime, is holding out.

A holdout occurs when a player, unsatisfied with his or her current contract or a contract offer made by a team, refuses to play. Players use the holdout as a ploy to obtain more favorable contract terms. Most holdouts are short and are settled quickly. But in some instances, neither side budes and the player ends up sitting out all or part of the season, as was the case of the athlete whose 1999 holdout is the subject of this paper: Joey Galloway, a wide receiver for the National Football League's (NFL) Dallas Cowboys. Here, I explore the ideology that emerges from beat coverage of Galloway's decision to seek renegotiation of his contract with his former team, the Seattle Seahawks.

Theoretical Foundations

Stuart Hall (1986) defines ideology as "the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works." My analysis of news coverage of the Galloway holdout is built on the idea that certain ideologies become dominant, to the exclusion of ideologies that present alternative perspectives; these are marginalized or suppressed. One way of "seeing the world" holds sway—it achieves hegemony, as Gramsci would argue. Hegemony is a "condition in process" that enables dominant institutions to exercise "moral and intellectual leadership" (Storey, 1998, p. 124). Through ideology, powerful groups can exercise control over individuals through what Foss refers to as "symbolic coercion" (1996, p. 294). "A dominant ideology controls what participants see as natural or obvious by establishing the norm," she argues (1996, p. 295).

Those subordinate to the dominant institutions "appear to support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to, and 'incorporate' them into, the prevailing structures of power" (Storey, 1998, p. 124). What we see as "normal discourse," then, sustains the ideology. Grossberg (1991) notes that ideology "works as a practice, not merely by producing a system of meanings which purport to represent the world but rather, by producing its own system of meanings as the real, natural (i.e. experienced) one" (p. 145). Challenges to the dominant ideology seem abnormal, Foss contends.

Class-based conflict, Storey notes, "is contained and channeled into ideologically safe harbors" (1998, p. 125) as Louis Althusser might argue. A process of continuous negotiation and concession to subordinate groups maintains hegemony. In exploring a text, then, we are not so much concerned with the "conflict between competing systems of meaning" as we are with the "power of a particular system to represent its own representations as a direct reflection of

the real, to produce its own meanings as experience" (Grossberg, 1991, p. 145).

An ideological analysis proceeds from the notion that the individual cannot have an experience apart from or outside the structures of power. We do not come to the text; the text locates us within its construction of experience, as Grossberg claims. Cultural practices, Grossberg argues, define our identities "by inserting [us] into the fabric of [our] discursive spaces" (1991, p. 146). Thus, how a text "produces meaning through its practices of structuring signifiers around the subject" (1991, p. 146) is at the heart of this analysis. My focus is not the knowledge provided by journalists about the Galloway's holdout, but rather how readers are "given access to that knowledge, and subsequently empowered or de-powered" (Grossberg, 1991, p. 146). My analysis will reveal that Galloway was positioned throughout the narrative crafted by journalists as deviant, as oppositional—as resisting the dominant ideology. Thus, news coverage of players who hold out is one mechanism through which they are "muted" and "contained" (Foss, 1996, p. 295).

As Cloud notes, hegemony permits resistance, but does so in a way that "defines the limits within which those articulations must be framed" (1994, p. 304). Resistance is often reshaped so that it cannot offer a substantial challenge to the dominant ideology. Opponents are even given the "rhetorical tools" needed to mount a challenge, but their efforts only bring limited challenge to the dominant ideology. Such is the case with news coverage of the Galloway holdout, as will be discussed later.

This research is also informed by the notion that texts invite preferred readings that encourage the formation of subject positions—the manner in which members of the audience are positioned to receive and interpret a text. We are the "absent source," as Grossberg argues, "responsible for the meanings produced, the transcendental agent of experience" (1991, p. 146). We are "complicitous" with our "insertion into the ideological production of an imaginary but lived reality" (1991, p. 146). The ideological nature of the texts explored here—newspaper articles about professional athletes—moves

readers toward interpretations desired by the reporters and editors who create them.

Exploration of these articles cannot occur without touching on the broader social and cultural context. We must look at how this ideological practice "is located within a network of other practices, at a particular point, in particular relations" (Grossberg, 1991, p. 148). Hegemony operates "on a broad terrain of social and cultural life" (1991, p. 149). The world of professional football provides the cultural backdrop for this study. Professional football is arguably the most popular of the so-called "major" US sports (baseball, football, basketball, hockey). The sport and its players inspire zealous devotion from fans.

A Communal Celebration

More important, the game reveals and sustains cultural values that are "proper to American institutions and ideology," as Real (1975, p. 93) explains. Pro football's summit, the Super Bowl, "is a communal celebration of and indoctrination into specific socially dominant emotions, life-styles, and values" (1975, p. 103) which include competition, aggression, and the subordination of the individual to the team. Hargreaves argues that the media portray sports "as symbolic representations of a particular kind of social order" (1982, p. 128). Framed in this fashion, sports become "modern morality plays, serving to justify and uphold dominant values and ideas" (1982, p. 128). Wenner (1998, p. 5) cites "the values of blatant consumerism" so evident in the presentation and packaging of football. "The game itself, framed as the heroic use of strategic aggression and force to acquire territory and thereby 'win,' may be seen as analogous to the ideals that undergird American marketplace ideology," Wenner claims (1998, p. 5), an ideology that positions the United States as a world power, a "winner."

Today, football reflects what Real calls the "culture of excess" which "rewards extremes of size, flamboyance, self-promotion, consumption, fame, and extravagance" (1975, p. 257). One characteristic that fans and reporters do not reward, however, is greed. Athletes who hold out are viewed as ungrateful, disloyal

mercenaries, a perception shaped in large measure by the preferred reading that emerges from coverage provided by sportswriters. Athletes can posture and preen—they can even beat each other up on the field—they just cannot ask for more money. Such conduct threatens the sanctity and stability of the sport, two concepts about which sports journalists write frequently.

Modern Racism

There has been little, if any, research on whether holdouts by white and by African-American athletes are covered differently by sports reporters. This does not mean, however, that the nagging tendency of reporters to portray African-Americans “in ways that create and maintain racist stereotypes” (Lule, 1995, p. 379) does not inform this analysis. Lule explains that an “anti-black affect” has pushed aside more blatant racist portrayals of African-Americans in the media. This “modern racism” includes “beliefs that discrimination is a thing of the past, that blacks push too hard and too fast, that black demands for opportunity are unfair, and that recent gains by blacks are undeserved” (1995, p. 379). A reporter practicing this kind of racism places African-Americans in one of a few social categories and portrays them in a way that reinforces stereotypes, stereotypes that are quite subtle, and which are “reinforced at levels likely to remain below conscious awareness” (Entman, 1992; quoted in Lule, 1995, p. 391).

In his analysis of boxer Mike Tyson’s arrest for rape and subsequent trial, Lule contends that reporters “debased” Tyson in order to propel grander dramas about him. Extensive, sometimes sensational coverage of his rape trial provided almost no “insight into the boxer and his life” (1995, p. 389). The newspapers studied by Lule did little more than offer “superficial storylines and crude stereotypes” in their coverage of Tyson. Months of coverage produced just two portrayals of Tyson: the “black, savage, sex-driven, former heavyweight champion” and the “dumb, innocent, but well-hung black boxer” (1995, p. 390).

Such a portrayal is a quite troubling example of the news media’s ability to “establish what is normal and what is deviant by the way they

portray people and ideas,” as Reese argues (1997, p. 425). News stories, writes Fair (1996), “constitute social relations in their creation, preservation, and mediation of a given reality.” These stories reflect the day-to-day working relationship between reporter, athlete, and team. Further, stories “carry with them the properties or characteristics of knowledge organized and processed by institutions that are part of the system of ruling” (1996, p. 7). As Oriard (1993) notes, “representations of football in the popular media are created and made available in ways that derive in part from the nature of the media, irrespective of their content” (p. xxii).

The meanings we find in the game are found in the narratives “that sportswriters and broadcasters choose to relate or ignore” (Oriard, 1993, p. xxiii). News organizations depend on professional sports leagues and franchises for a steady stream of product. Some scholars (e.g., Rosentraub, 1997) argue that this dependence has turned journalists once again into advocates for leagues and their teams. Instead of exploring how team ownership treats its players during contract negotiations or during a holdout, journalists often focus on a player’s financial demands, framing them as outrageous. A holdout threatens to change the complexion of the dramas on which journalists depend to entice and keep their readers. Some journalists do indeed eclipse this narrow frame; however, the fact that so many do not should be of concern to journalists and their editors.

Method

Articles for the analysis were taken from the websites of Seattle’s two daily newspapers, the *Post-Intelligencer* and the *Times*. The *Times* and *Post-Intelligencer* function under a joint operating agreement reached in 1983 under the Newspaper Preservation Act (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, n.d.). The Seattle Times Company, partially owned by Knight-Ridder, handles advertising, circulation, and marketing for both papers while maintaining separate editorial departments. I focused on beat coverage appearing between the end of the summer 1999, when players began reporting to Seahawks training camp, and the second week in November, when

Galloway returned to the Seahawks lineup. Thirty-five articles on Galloway's holdout were obtained from the *Times*, and 26 from the *Post-Intelligencer*. Articles about the Galloway holdout were analyzed to determine if reporters worked to maintain the authority of the NFL and the Seahawks as it applied to Galloway's situation.

Textual analysis supplies a sound method of exploring texts as "constituents of social relations" (Smith, 1990, p. 6) through which ideological meaning emerges. It enables the researcher to move beyond content analysis by exploring "every significant stylistic, visual, linguistic, presentational, and rhetorical feature" in a text, as Hall (1975, p. 15) notes. The researcher focuses on the latent meanings and discursive and thematic strategies found in the text. One cannot perform a textual analysis without considering the connection between the content and the conditions of production and reception. An exploration of the cultural context may yield evidence of institutional constraint.

As du Gay (1997) explains, textual analysis must be discussed and applied in terms of its political and social implications. For Foss, analyzing the emergence of ideology is accomplished if the researcher addresses three concerns (1996, p. 297). First, the researcher must explore the preferred reading in the text. He or she should ask, "what does the artifact ask the audience to believe, understand, feel, or think about?" Next, the researcher must identify those groups whose interests are represented in the text. Special attention should be paid to those groups whose interests form the dominant ideology and those groups whose interests are "negated" or "unexpressed." Foss then instructs researchers to examine the text for the "rhetorical features that promote one ideology over others" (1996, p. 297) and that create and support the dominant ideology. I do not claim that coverage of all holdouts proceed in this fashion. I do argue, however, that certain themes do recur, themes that support the team's—and the game's—read of the situation. I will now explore each of the key themes that emerge from coverage of Galloway.

Making Concessions

Joey Galloway enjoyed a celebrated career at Ohio State University (OSU). He is second all-time at OSU in touchdown passes (19), and ranks fourth in career receptions (108) and yards gained from pass receptions (1894; NFL, n.d.). Galloway was selected in the first round of the 1995 NFL draft by the Seattle Seahawks. Galloway emerged as "one of the most electrifying performers in the game" (Farnsworth, 1999a, p. 2). In each of his first four seasons, he led the team in receiving yards (Allen, 1999a, p. 1). During that same span, he caught more than 250 passes, 36 for touchdowns, and gained more than 4000 yards. Galloway also scored touchdowns on four punt returns of more than 50 yards. In 1999, Galloway was in the final year of a five-year contract with the Seahawks. He was scheduled to make \$1.6 million in 1999, but decided to seek an extension that would have made him one of the highest paid players at his position.

Additionally, journalists and his own teammates questioned his commitment to the team and his desire to play, a theme that the writers who covered the Seahawks soon picked up on. Galloway rejected the team's offer of a five-year, \$22 million deal. The Seahawks, under new ownership, later withdrew a seven-year, \$35 million offer to Galloway, who decided to sit out training camp until his demands were met. From July to November 1999, Galloway and the Seahawks were embroiled in a public dispute over the terms of the contract extension. Galloway returned to the Seahawks in mid-November, but was traded to the Dallas Cowboys in February 2000.

At the end of July 1999, *Seattle Times* reporter Percy Allen wrote about Galloway's "Seahawk legacy and growing status as a Seattle sports icon" (1999a, p. 1). Allen portrayed Galloway as humble, uncomfortable with the fame his stellar play brought him—he was a "reluctant superstar" (1999a, p. 4). According to Allen, he "gives the Seahawks an identity" (1999a, p. 4). Several months of talks about a new contract between Galloway and the Seahawks "heated up" (1999a, p. 1) as the team headed to training camp, claimed a team executive. Still, Galloway

had not yet directly challenged the team. These developments marked the start of a period of "negotiating" between Galloway and the team. Coverage suggests that Seahawk officials were content at this point to allow Galloway to launch rhetorical trial balloons about renegotiating his contract. Reporters implied that the team still had control of the situation. More significantly, team officials were already successfully laying out their version of events as "a direct reflection of the real" (Grossberg, 1991, p. 145).

The *Post-Intelligencer* reported that Galloway wanted an extension "for substantially more money" (Farnsworth, 1999a, p. 1). Both papers noted that Galloway's asking price would be affected by new contracts signed by several other all-star receivers. Galloway's agent, Eric Metz, told Allen that a contract signed by the San Francisco 49ers' Terrell Owens worth \$35 million over seven years, "is a good place to start" in negotiations. "There's little left for Galloway to prove," he said (1999a, p. 2). Allen explained that Galloway's signing bonus could reach as high as \$12 million (1999a, p. 2). "Joey should be in the same financial class as the other top receivers," Metz was quoted as saying.

While it was unclear whether Galloway would attend training camp if a new deal was not worked out, the parties were working on the problem. "[I]t might not be easy," Metz told Allen. "But we're working hard to get him there." Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren, embarking on his first season in Seattle, expressed concern to the *Post-Intelligencer* about a possible holdout, especially since Galloway was under contract. But at this point in the coverage, the threat of a holdout existed, but was minimal. "I don't think that's going to happen," Holmgren said (Allen, 1999a, p. 1). The team was tolerating Galloway's challenge to its authority.

Still, beat reporters pointed to some warning signs about Galloway's conduct, as if they were patrolling for threats to the take on events spun by the team. Team officials were pleased with Galloway's performance during mini-camp, but said they would like to gauge his performance in the team's new offensive scheme "over the course of the season before making long-term commitments" (Allen, 1999a, p. 3). Galloway was reduced to a highly-priced cog in a com-

plex, fine-tuned machine. One ominous note, however, appears midway through Allen's story: "Time is running out." Here, a strand of the dominant ideology emerges: a player's identity must give way to the team's identity, to the team's attempts to improve. This "warning sign" hints at the subsequent marginalization by Seattle sportswriters of Galloway and his reasons for holding out.

When Galloway turned down the Seahawks \$35 million offer, coverage turned decidedly skeptical. The team had made a good faith effort to bring Galloway back into the fold—team officials "acquiesced" (Allen, 1999d, p. 1) to his demand that he be made the highest-paid receiver in the NFL. The team was "comfortable" with its offer, the *Post-Intelligencer* reported (Farnsworth, 1999c, p. 1). But Galloway and Metz were "just as comfortable turning it down." Metz, the *Times* reported, was "irritated" (Allen, 1999d, p. 1) that negotiations had bogged down. The team was doing everything it could to satisfy Galloway. His greed was beginning to get in the way of his relationship with the team.

Reporters began to take away the rhetorical tools used by Metz to make his client's case. Holmgren, they suggested, was put upon by Galloway, and by the acrimony that marks modern player-team relations. In tandem with Holmgren, they yearned for a time when player-team relations were simpler and less acrimonious—a reversion, perhaps, to a time when sportswriters acted as publicity shills for teams. With the Packers, Holmgren's job was simple: "win football games" (Allen, 1999b, p. 1). All Holmgren had to do was coach. He "didn't have to worry about contracts, salary caps, and threats of holdouts. The dollars and nonsense of football were left to others" (Allen, 1999b, p. 1). For Holmgren and other NFL coaches, one reporter wrote almost wistfully, "holdouts have become a way of life" (Farnsworth, 1999b). Holmgren went through them "on an almost yearly basis" when he was with the Packers (1999b, p. 1).

A former Seahawk holdout, quarterback Warren Moon, told the *Times* that two-a-day practices with the Kansas City Chiefs had drained him. "Consider it payback for the four weeks of

camp [Moon] missed last year," the *Times* wrote of Moon's 1998 holdout. The missed time "lingers" (*Seattle Times*, 1999a, p. 2); Moon will forever be known in Seattle as someone who jeopardized the team's success by refusing to report to camp unless the team renegotiated his contract. Where Moon held out for pride, Galloway was driven by greed, according to Moon. Moon sensed "a hesitancy on Galloway's part to make things work in Seattle" (1999a, p. 3). Thus, a player who once had the fortitude to challenge the team was now deployed by the team, with the able assistance of Seahawk beat reporters, to marginalize Galloway.

Seahawk beat reporters offered readers a one-sided history of holdouts, one built almost entirely on quotes from team officials. This reinforced the official take on Galloway's actions. "Most holdouts don't go well," team vice president Mike Reinfeldt said (Allen, 1999g, p. 3). "The ones that are OK go for a short period of time. Unfortunately, holdouts are a part of professional sports. You deal with it as best you can. You try to be professional." This suggests that football has been unnecessarily complicated by demanding players and their agents. Both Holmgren and Reinfeldt were portrayed as tough negotiators, skilled at navigating the murky shoals of player negotiations. According to Holmgren, Reinfeldt was "very direct and very prepared. He's not the type to get on the phone and chitchat with agents. He doesn't have the time to schmooze" (Allen, 1999g, p. 2).

With Holmgren's added responsibilities as Seahawks coach came having "to cater to demanding agents who represent equally demanding players" (Allen, 1999b, p. 1). This paints players as mercenaries, and marginalizes the legitimate gains made through competent union representation of players and the rise of free agency. Talks with Galloway remained cordial throughout his holdout, despite Holmgren's decision to fine him \$5,000 for each missed day of training camp. "That's the business," Holmgren told Allen (1999e, p. 1). Galloway reiterated his desire to be paid "what the market shows" (Farnsworth, 1999i, p. 2). Allen (1999h, p. 1) quoted Galloway as saying he would not accept "playing for something that's way below

market value." Many players, he said, have received longer contracts. "And that's what I want. I want to be in Seattle. I want to sign a long deal . . . I want all those things".

But for that to happen, both sides have to come together and get something done" (Farnsworth, 1999i, p. 2). To play for the money offered by the Seahawks "wouldn't be smart," Galloway said (Allen, 1999h, p. 1). His teammates would do the same thing. "I've talked to a number of them, and they understand the business of the game," Galloway said (Allen, 1999k, p. 2). But Allen suggested that while teammates had publicly supported Galloway, it was impossible "for anyone to miss so much time and not offend his co-workers" (Allen, 1999m, p. 2). Seattle quarterback Jon Kitna recognized Galloway's dilemma, however. "That's the business part of things, and you have to separate that from your feelings as a team," he said (1999m, p. 2).

Hurting the Team

Galloway's failure to come to training camp soon harmed the team. Farnsworth (1999b, p. 1) reported that Galloway's absence "siphoned a bit of the effervescence surrounding the team's first training camp under Holmgren." Holmgren said he would not let the holdout become a distraction (Allen, 1999a; Farnsworth, 1999b,g). "I will not let this detract what we are here to accomplish," he said (Farnsworth, 1999b, p. 1). The team would go on without him, reporters suggested, damaged but undaunted. Team officials recognized that Galloway was a key part of the team's plan. Holmgren, in his first year with the Seahawks, was desperately trying to move the team forward, to "sever ties to the Seahawks' recent mediocre past" (Allen, 1999a, p. 3).

Holmgren's plan revolved around implementation of a new offensive scheme, one that Galloway would not be able to understand without the proper preparation. Holmgren had no doubts about Galloway's ability—he can certainly "go long" as the *Post-Intelligencer* explained—but said that he "frowns" (Allen, 1999b, p. 2) on the idea of a holdout. Star players have to "understand how necessary it is to

conduct themselves for the sake of the football team," Holmgren told Percy Allen. Galloway had to learn "the domino effect" (Allen, 1999c) of his actions, but there was still time for this to happen, suggested reporters: "[g]ive a little, take a little. Show some good faith, and receive some in return," wrote Farnsworth.

At the beginning of August, Holmgren reported confidently that "there's no damage" from Galloway's holdout (Allen, 1999c, p. 2), but added he did not want to see Galloway stay away too long. Still, Holmgren would eventually say that he was ready to go on without Galloway. "Either he's here or he's not here. I can't go out and sign a Joey Galloway clone. Those guys aren't around. So if he's not here, we play with who's here," he said (Farnsworth, 1999f, p. 1). During a phone conversation with Galloway reported by the *Post-Intelligencer*, Holmgren told his star player, "Listen, we want you here. But this is our offer, it's a fair offer" (Farnsworth, 1999e, p. 2). Holmgren's welcome remained in effect, even after Galloway rejected the offer: "I would hope he'd walk in the door and say he is ready to play" (Farnsworth, 1999h, p. 1).

Indeed, as *Times* columnist Steve Kelley wrote, "[n]o matter what you think of the holdout, the contract demands, and the lack of respect he may have shown to his teammates, the fact is, the Seahawks are a much better team with Joey Galloway" (Kelley, 1999c, p. 1). The Seahawks "have a passel of respectable receivers, but no Road Runner to ripple the Kingdome rug" (Thiel, 1999, p. 2). Recall Cloud's notion that hegemony allows resistance, but also produces and deploys the limits of that resistance. It was time for Galloway to come back to camp, reporters suggested, echoing the team's line. As Todd Gitlin notes, the function of reporters, is to "certify the limits within which all competing definitions of reality will contend" (1980, p. 254).

Teammates quoted in the early stages of the controversy were willing to give Galloway the benefit of the doubt about his holdout, a sentiment that mystified at least one journalist: "[N]one of his teammates faults Galloway—though they should—because everyone understands that this NFL thing is huge business"

(Vecsey, 1999a, p. 2). Indeed, Seahawks wide receiver Sean Dawkins told Allen that Galloway will "come back when he feels comfortable and when he feels right with his contract. When he comes back, it's going to be cool. I don't think anybody is going to give him a hard time" (Allen, 1999d, p. 2). Allen reminded readers that Seahawks defensive back Shawn Springs had gone through a holdout during his rookie season. "But this is a little different—he's under contract," Springs said. "He told me 'I'll be there.' But he probably did that because he didn't want me to think anything else. So I left it at that" (1999d, p. 2).

Seattle reporters rarely used Galloway's teammates as sources. Instead, they made broader, typically unattributed statements about their general dislike of Galloway. When other players did appear, they supported Galloway, but only in vague, pragmatic terms. Some, like Seahawks quarterback Jon Kitna, focused on how the team would perform without him: "I'm just approaching it as if he won't be here. This is the team we're going with" (Allen, 1999i, p. 2). Journalists focused on what Galloway would mean to the players when he finally returned to the team, and the rituals in which they would engage to welcome him back. The *Times* reported that Galloway could expect "another assault on his pocketbook—this time from his teammates" when he came back, in the form of paying for an expensive dinner at an exclusive Seattle restaurant.

Thus, the issues that motivated Galloway to hold out were reduced to getting "razzed" by teammates (Allen, 1999e, p. 2). "He can't come in here thinking he's not going to feel some heat," said wide receiver Mike Pritchard (Farnsworth, 1999k, p. 2). Reporters found a few more pragmatic assessments of his motivations: "Each person has their negotiating ways," Seahawk wide receiver Mike Pritchard told the *Times*. "[H]e's doing it the way he feels he needs to and what's best for him and his family" (Allen, 1999e, p. 2). Galloway was not reaching out to his teammates, continuing the theme of aloofness developed by reporters. "I don't overdo it," he told Percy Allen. "I've talked to a couple of players a couple of times . . . to let them know that I'm with them in spirit" (Allen,

1999h, p. 3). "I want nothing but the best for them regardless of whether I'm there or not."

But to be successful, a team must enjoy the unquestioning support of its players, something Galloway had never given to the Seahawks, according to *Post-Intelligencer* writer Farnsworth. As the holdout went on, reporters began to suggest that Galloway's ongoing lack of commitment began to anger his teammates. "He's not a guy that many players will go out of their way for," an unidentified Seahawk told columnist Art Thiel. For all of his talent, "Galloway also failed to ingrain himself in the franchise, among the fans and with his teammates," wrote Laura Vecsey (1999b, p. 2). All players should follow this course, these writers claim, "Too many people have viewed Galloway with cold detachment—exactly the sort of demeanor Galloway projects." Galloway was not a team player, someone driven by greed, a selfish prima donna who was reluctant to get his uniform dirty, someone who seemed "more interested in style than substance" (Kelley, 1999a, p. 2).

Galloway, wrote *Times* columnist Ron Judd (1999, p. 2) "is known for two things: blazing speed, and the lack of the necessary guts to sweat though the two-a-days." Galloway's teammates "have questioned his commitment on an every-down, everyday basis" (Farnsworth, 1999b, p. 2). Reporters raised questions about Galloway's desire. "[W]hen you think of Galloway, you don't just think about the plays he has made," one wrote. "You think about the plays the 27-year-old Seahawks receiver has not made" (Vecsey, 1999a, p. 1). One wondered if Galloway "has the guts to be a true franchise player" (1999a, p. 1). Something about Galloway, the reporter wrote, "has always smacked of being too precious, too special to be the gritty, anything-to-win player worthy of a club's biggest contract" (1999a, p. 1).

Galloway made a habit of taking himself out of games, so much so, wrote Laura Vecsey of the *Post-Intelligencer*, that he "has elevated the art of breathing to an art form" (1999a, p. 2). Galloway "doesn't play football for the joy or for the rings," wrote *Times* columnist Steve Kelley. "He doesn't play hurt. He doesn't practice hard. He does the minimum amount of work" (Kelley, 1999b, p. 1). Unlike star NFL wide receiver

Keyshawn Johnson, who sublimated his "smack talk and ego" for the good of the team, Galloway might not be the kind of player "who helps make his team a winner" (1999b, p. 1). In Holmgren, Galloway now had the same type of driven, no-nonsense coach as Johnson did in Bill Parcells—like Holmgren, the embodiment of the team's authority, and, as Parcells did with Johnson, the only one who could transform Galloway from a petulant malcontent into a team player. But until he came into camp, Galloway would remain without "a clue about what it takes to be a real winner" (Vecsey, 1999a, p. 3).

Galloway's teammates were never enamored of him, in large part because of this perceived lack of commitment to the game. "I've heard plenty of teammates talk about your dazzling speed, but I haven't heard anybody talk about your heart," Kelley wrote at the end of August (1999a, p. 2). At training camp, "I didn't hear a whole lot of 'Gosh, we miss Joey Galloway.' Or, 'Man, why is Holmgren messing with Joey?'" (1999a, p. 2). The rest of the Seahawks were playing by the rules, recognizing Holmgren and the team's authority, conforming. Reporters held them up as role models for Galloway. Kelley said Holmgren was the solution to Galloway's desire problem. "He'll push you. Which, by the way is what you need" (1999a, p. 2). Kelley suggested that Holmgren's approach to running the team would make a "man" out of Galloway, a "man" who exhibits the hegemonically masculine characteristics discussed by Trujillo.

Even more troubling for reporters was Galloway's lack of love for football. "Galloway won't care about missing a season. The game doesn't mean that much to him," Kelley wrote (1999a, p. 3). Unlike teammate Mike Pritchard, who played an entire game with an impacted wisdom tooth, Galloway simply did not care. "Give Galloway . . . a piece of Pritchard's heart and he'd catch 100 passes every year and he'd play in the playoffs and Pro Bowls for the next 10 years," Kelley said. Reporters typically laud players who have "heart," and who play for "the love of the game." These players, too, make large sums of money. But money was Galloway's only motivation. "He wants to make the cover of *Forbes*, not *Sports Illustrated*. He wants

to be *Wall Street Journal's* man of the year, not the NFL's MVP." Where Pritchard "plays for the love," Galloway "plays for the loot" (1999a, p. 3).

Throughout the coverage, money was cited as Galloway's sole motivation for holding out. "The Seahawks thought they had given Joey Galloway 35 million reasons to end his holdout," Farnsworth wrote in the *Post-Intelligencer* after Galloway rejected the Seahawks' offer (1999c, p. 1). "In a business supported primarily by fans who can't afford decent furniture, he mocks the \$5 million a year on the table," columnist Ron Judd wrote. "He laughs off a \$7 million signing bonus he's never earned. Give me \$10 million, he says. Then we'll talk about my loyalty" (1999, p. 3). Judd then ratcheted up his criticism: "Good one, Joey. You go, guy. Your holdout to this point has proved only that you're a stupendous fool" (1999, p. 3).

Life Without Football

Galloway soon told reporters he would be willing to sit out the season. "[I]t's not my life," he told Farnsworth of the *Post-Intelligencer* (1999i, p. 1). "I'm not going to sit around and mope about this thing." Galloway acknowledged that he would rather be playing. "But if it doesn't work out that way, I'm absolutely fine" (1999i, p. 1). To keep in shape, Galloway began playing quarterback for a flag football team in Wheeling, West Virginia (*Seattle Times*, 1999c, p. 1). "It gives me something to compete at," Galloway said. He watched on television as the Seahawks opened their 1999 season against Chicago Bears.

The *Times* reported that Galloway was keeping himself busy with household chores. "There's his new puppy that requires house training. His beloved Ohio State Buckeyes need his support. And he must remove a squirrel that has somehow made a home inside his house" (Allen, 1999j, p. 1). But he was alone, away from football. "I'm fine. I'm OK. Really," he told the *Times* Percy Allen. His identity, at least as described by the Seahawk beat reporters, was defined by football, by his competitive nature.

Galloway's domestic endeavors appeared to be a charade to hide his frustration at not being

able to play. "This is it, this is my season right here," he said. "I'm a football player, and I love to play football. If I'm not going to do it in Seattle, then I'd love to play somewhere else. But again, it's not my first choice." Galloway refused to panic "as his hopes of playing in the NFL this season slowly fade," one reporter wrote (Allen, 1999j, p. 1).

Reporters portrayed Galloway as an elusive loner. "For now, no one knows where Galloway is, presumably at his Ohio home," Percy Allen wrote in the *Times* (1999c, p. 1). The *Times* later reported that Galloway's "whereabouts" as his holdout reached its 11th day "are unknown" (Allen, 1999f, p. 1). In late August, Galloway bought season tickets for football games at his *alma mater*, Ohio State (Farnsworth, 1999d, p. 1). The *Times* reported that "Galloway sightings" in Seattle "have been common, including false reports from patrons in a Kirkland restaurant" who mistook another Seahawks player for Galloway (*Seattle Times*, 1999b, p. 1). Here, the reporter treats Galloway like a reclusive, eccentric celebrity. "People keeping guessing about what is coming down, but I'm the only person who really knows. And even I don't know yet," he told Farnsworth (1999k, p. 1) days before he returned to the team.

But Galloway's love for the game drove him back. "[H]e was struck by what he was missing and just how badly he was missing it," Farnsworth wrote (1999m, p. 2). "I realized that playing football is really what I wanted to do," Galloway said. "Certainly this was better than throwing fly patterns to ex-jocks in the Sunday morning flag football leagues," wrote *Times* columnist Steve Kelley (1999d, p. 2). The mythic power of the game—to its players, to its fans—had been reinforced. It subsumed Galloway, and cancelled out the issues raised during the holdout. Galloway ended "his 101-day holdout this morning because he misses playing football" (Farnsworth, 1999k, p. 1).

But before Galloway agreed to return to the Seahawks, he questioned an NFL-established deadline for his return. This inspired renewed skepticism from team officials and players. Reporters portrayed the rocky return as if the team was dealing with a recalcitrant child. "If and when I see him, I'll be very excited,"

Holmgren said (Farnsworth, 1999k, p. 1). About reports of Galloway's return, Holmgren said: "If I had a dollar for every report I've heard, I could retire from this job and live pretty well" (Farnsworth, 1999j, p. 1). Holmgren recalled a conversation with Galloway which made the player sound like a child who had been sent to his room for bad behavior: "The last time I talked to him, I kind of sensed maybe that he was thinking a little bit more about it than he had been previously" (1999j, p. 1).

Team officials were even less optimistic, according to the *Times's* Percy Allen: "Like a worried parent sitting up late, the Seahawks are pacing and peering out the windows looking for Joey Galloway" (1999k, p. 1). Galloway caused even more worry when he missed a connecting flight on his way from Columbus, Ohio to Seattle (Allen, 1999l, p. 1; Farnsworth, 1999l, p. 1). The team was still taking "a wait and see approach," wrote Percy Allen (1999l, p. 1). The delay left a squadron of reporters without a story (Farnsworth, 1999l, p. 1). "Galloway missed quite a show, which was all in his honor," wrote Farnsworth (1999l, p. 1).

Galloway's teammates, however, were ready to celebrate. "I think he realizes that he wants to be part of this team. I think he wants to play football and he's ready to play," said wide receiver Mike Pritchard. Kitna acknowledged that he could "say the right things—we can win without him, and all that." But he could not hide his enthusiasm when he spoke to Galloway: "[T]he guys here would love to have you back" (Farnsworth, 1999k, p. 1).

There would be no hard feelings, said offensive lineman Pete Kendall. "Any time you can have a guy who's a game-breaker, and Galloway is a bona fide game breaker, you take 'em when you can get 'em" (Farnsworth, 1999k, p. 2). But at least one journalist (Thiel, 1999) suggested that the love felt by Galloway's teammates might be based only on sheer pragmatism: "His teammates will embrace him, because his return may provide the finishing touch on an entirely unexpected season" (1999k, p. 1). The Seahawks had won five of their first seven games without Galloway, and their performance could only improve with Galloway on the team.

When Galloway did return, beat writers partially abandoned criticism of Galloway's motives. "There will be no you-should-have-been-heres, no where-you-beens, no guilt trips, no anger," *Times* columnist Steve Kelley wrote in early November. "To the players, his holdout was a pragmatic business decision. Nothing personal" (1999c, p. 1). Still, Kelley called the holdout a "joke" (1999c, p. 2). *Post-Intelligencer* columnist Art Thiel referred to Galloway's action as a "moronic holdout" (1999, p. 1) and reminded readers that Galloway "walked out on his teammates and a valid contract" (1999, p. 3).

The game of football, however, must go on. "[I]n the NFL there is little time for or interest in moral dilemmas. Joey Stayaway soon will be Joey Galloway again, and it doesn't matter that he lost his fight and looked like a fool" (Thiel, 1999, p. 3). One wonders if the sometimes personal criticism of Galloway by Seattle journalists is also just business, part of a convention invoked whenever an athlete holds out.

The coaching staff turned its attention to getting him ready to play. Reporters continued to be skeptical of Galloway's conduct. Farnsworth (1999m, p. 1) reported that while Galloway had "checked any lingering hard feelings at the door" when he returned, he "said and did all the right things" during a press conference. He was "engaging and even disarming" (1999m, p. 1). Farnsworth seems to suggest that Galloway—and perhaps all professional athletes—are insincere and calculating, so much so that Galloway needed one last lesson from reporters about commitment from none other than his father, James.

Percy Allen of the *Times* described the elder Galloway as being "from the old school, having stayed married to the same women for nearly four decades and having retired after working for the same company for 36 years" (1999m, p. 1). The elder Galloway, "who knows a thing or two about commitment" (1999m, p. 1), admitted he was disappointed with his son. Again, Galloway was treated like a recalcitrant child, going through a phase: "I like to see him play, but I didn't tell him that," James Galloway said. "I thought he had enough on his mind, and there was no use in him playing if he wasn't into it" (Allen, 1999m, p. 1). Eventually, Joey came to

his senses—and went to his father for advice. “I told him he needed to end this thing and play football,” James Galloway said. He had learned his lesson.

Galloway told reporters he felt like he was starting over. He had been knocked down a few pegs, reporters suggested. This was the punishment for his recalcitrance, for his attempt to challenge the team. Holmgren assigned him to the scout team (which practices against the team’s first-string defense) when he returned to practice. Chastened, his status on the team was diminished—subject to a different kind of “muting,” as Foss might argue. “Practicing for the first time was the first step in coming back,” wrote the *Post-Intelligencer’s* Farnsworth. “And a baby one at that” (1999n, p. 1).

Laura Vecsey described one practice play this way: “In his patented baggy blue shorts that make him look like a squirt kid brother out to show why he’s the best, Galloway danced to the line of scrimmage, and then, bam, he was gone” (1999b, p. 1). Seahawk assistant coaches wanted Galloway to play in the team’s next game. “But the only vote that counts will be cast by the Big Man,” as Holmgren was referred to by his players (Farnsworth, 1999n, p. 2). This passage again exemplifies the unquestioning support for Holmgren’s authority shown by beat reporters.

Times columnist Steve Kelley (1999d, p. 1) congratulated Holmgren for outlasting Galloway. His no-nonsense stance had brought Galloway back into the fold. He saved the team \$1 million in salary, won six games without Galloway, and improved team chemistry in the bargain: “Game, set, and match to Holmgren,” Kelley wrote (1999d, p. 1). For the chastened Galloway, it was an easy call: “[A]ll I can do is do everything I can to get ready and then let him [Holmgren] make the decision. The acrimony that marked the holdout was gone—a glitch. “I just talked to Coach and let him know that that stuff is in my past right now” (Kelley, 1999d, p. 3). But beat reporters would not let Galloway forget his immediate past. Allen called the holdout “prolonged and unsuccessful” (1999n, p. 2). Vecsey (1999b, p. 1) wrote that Galloway’s scintillating first practice came “just two days after tucking his tail between his legs and reporting . . . after a hold-

out so loud no other free agent-to-be will likely ever challenge Mike Holmgren.”

Conclusions

The ideological construction of Joey Galloway’s holdout by Seattle sportswriters revolves around several key ideas: the team is sacred—it is bigger, and has more value, than any of its individual members; the coach is the ultimate authority figure, one whose judgment should never be questioned; a holdout by its very nature threatens the team; and players who do hold out are seen as selfish and disloyal. Reporters presented Galloway’s reasons for holding out as secondary to the goals of the team. In maintaining the boundaries of acceptable discourse, boundaries set with help from the team, they painted a picture of Galloway as a spoiled child who had to be stripped of his individuality and receive a “time out” before coming back to the team.

Along the way, reporters only briefly explored the reasons offered by Galloway for his holdout. Readers were told only that his absence disrupted and damaged the team. Galloway was allowed to provide only a few reasons for his decision: he had to do what was best for his family; it was all part of the business. Reporters filled in the other reasons: Galloway was a mercenary, aloof and driven solely by greed. Reporters did not entertain the possibility that Galloway was holding out as a matter of principle.

While away from the team, he was a recluse. Galloway was nothing without football; he was reduced to playing flag football—a far cry from playing in the NFL. Further, the holdout was set against a historical backdrop which saw Holmgren yearning for a simpler, uncomplicated time when holdouts did not happen—ostensibly a time before players were represented by the National Football League Players’ Association (NFLPA).

Trujillo (1991) might argue that framing Galloway in this way actually threatened the kind of hegemonic masculinity we might expect to see in the portrayal of a professional athlete. Instead of being portrayed as a “breadwinner” who was looking out for his family, Galloway was almost

submissive, his demands reduced to one: more money. Reporters tolerated Galloway's initial movement toward contract renegotiation because he was still part of the discourse on negotiations established by the team. Galloway was operating in an "ideologically safe harbor" that the team and reporters had created. Players should pursue large salaries, reporters suggest, but only if that pursuit does not chip away at the team's authority, and by extension, to the game's cultural authority.

Reporters repeatedly questioned Galloway's desire to play football, his commitment to the Seahawks, and whether he was tough enough to play professional football. By not playing, and by forsaking the team for personal gain, he gave up any power he might have had (Connell, 1983). Reporters criticized his on-field accomplishments—his "occupational achievement," to use Trujillo's term—despite the fact that they were comparable to other top-level NFL wide receivers. They went from portraying Galloway as a talented but reluctant superstar, happy with the team and with the city of Seattle to a reclusive, petulant person who was driven only by greed. There is, however, one element of hegemonic masculinity in the coverage of Galloway: it was Galloway's father, a man who reporters claimed knew "a thing or two about commitment," who helped bring Galloway to his senses and back to the team. One almost expected reporters to reference Tom Brokaw's *Greatest Generation* in their description of the elder Galloway.

When Galloway returned, he was warily welcomed back by team officials and his teammates. He told reporters that football was not the most important thing in his life, but he eventually admitted that he could not live without it. Reporters moved him toward becoming reacquainted with unthinking devotion to the team. Seahawk players—at least some of whom would hold out if they felt the terms of their contracts were unfair—generally supported the reporters' characterization of Galloway as aloof and spoiled—that is, until he was back on the team. Galloway's problems with his contract were moved out of the frame as reporters described in detail the media circus

that accompanied his return and the fraternity-style "razzing" he received from his teammates.

Although this paper is built on examples from one holdout, I think this approach to covering holdouts rises to the level of convention, although more research must be done to confirm my hypothesis. I say this for several reasons. First, conflict, as newswriting students learn, is newsworthy. Squabbles between player and team drive readership. Readers dislike greedy, selfish players, a fact exploited by league and team officials. Second, the treatment of Galloway reflects what I think is a growing dependence of sportswriters on teams, rather than players, for information. Players are increasingly reluctant to talk to reporters, either because they have been damaged by past stories or because they want to save their most stirring comments for their Web pages. In addition, team public relations officials strictly monitor access to players.

Third, a holdout by a key player threatens the integrity of the product that the team puts on the field, a product that receives more than ample coverage, most of it positive, from reporters. Disagreeable players damage the brand created for the NFL by team and league officials. Without their stars, teams are weaker, will not draw as many fans, and will not sell as much merchandise. The team, the league—indeed, the game—must go on. This perhaps explains why Seattle sportswriters wrote so extensively about the receivers who would have replaced Galloway. This ideology is built on the journalist's active encouragement of fan cynicism. By delegitimizing the motivations of professional athletes, journalists encourage fans to question their loyalty. This enables teams to define a holdout as ungrateful and decidedly not heroic. Reporters underscore this point by suggesting that players did not hold out when the game was pure and not complicated by tricky labor issues.

I hope that my findings resonate with sports fans, and enable them to look critically at coverage by sportswriters of labor issues. I believe they will help journalists reevaluate their treatment of professional athletes. Finally, this paper provides a framework for future study of race in the social construction of

holdouts. Evidence of stereotyping abounds in coverage of Galloway: he was made to seem like a materialistic, greedy child who had the physical talent to excel, but lacked the necessary desire. These reporters would probably argue that they were being objective, and that they resisted attempts by the Seahawks to manipulate coverage. Perhaps—but I also believe that the ideology born of the relationship between their news organizations, the team, and the league led them to create a picture of Galloway that supported the team's handling of his

holdout, one that smacks of the “modern racism” cited by Lule and a host of celebrated scholars.

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